

[Jonathan Stone.]



THE

Board of Health of the City of Boston.

IS IT A PUBLIC NUISANCE?

PLEASE READ, REFLECT AND HAND TO YOUR NEIGHBOR.

What benefit is the Board of Health of the City of Boston?

Why is the death-rate larger in Boston than in most of the cities and towns in the State?

Where do the citizens and tax-payers get an equivalent for the large amount of money expended?

Is the Board of Health of Boston as at present managed, a greater nuisance than all the nuisances combined which they seek to abate?

They spend a very large amount of the people's money; about \$63,000 the last year, and have spent a much larger amount some years. They send out 25,000 or 30,000 notices a year; keep the owners of real estate constantly annoyed, and cause them unnecessary expense. They act as auxiliaries to worthless tenants. If one is warned out for non payment of rent, or wishes to move and injure the owner or damage his property, he goes to the Board of Health and complains that the house is damp or smells bad, and the Board immediately orders the owner to abate the nuisance. I have known a number of such cases. If a filthy tenant who is always boiling and steaming and stewing, and never opens the windows to air out, or let out the steam, complains to the Board of Health that the house is damp, the owner immediately gets a notice to remedy the evil. A tenant was warned out

of a house who owed about one years' rent; he went to the Board and stated that the reason he moved was on account of the house being damp and smelling bad; all of which was false, but the owner was notified to repair the house. An owner of several houses, a man who always keeps his houses in the best repair, and spends his whole time in looking after them, has received twenty-five or thirty notices from the Board, when there was no occasion for more than one or two, and they not such as to require the action of a Board of Health. One case, a mischief-making neighbor complained of a privy; the Board sent a young man to examine; he told the tenants living in the house that he saw no cause of complaint, but, nevertheless, a notice was sent to repair the privy; an answer was returned that the privy was in repair; not satisfied, a man was sent to see the owner, who inquired what the matter was with the privy; he said there was a knot-hole in it; the owner shut the door in his face and heard nothing more from the Board. Another case where the same owner had a tenant who had a child taken sick with diphtheria; the doctor reported, and an inspector was sent from the Board, and instead of inquiring if the child had been exposed to the disease, or whether she had been properly clad, or been out in unsuitable weather, he rushed around the house to find the cause of the disease; went to the sink and poured a vial of peppermint down the sink spout and threw the vial out of the window (for it would not do to save it and use it again, that would be mean); he then went down under the L, and saw on the sink-spout a little sap stain, and he exclaimed, "There it is, there it is! Who owns this house?" Getting the name, the owner was notified to repair the spout. Now this conductor was new; had been in about one year and did not leak; the spot he saw was a sap stain on the wood, but the owner knew he must do something or be annoyed with another notice, so he got a trowel of mortar and plastered on where it entered the brick chimney, which was perfectly tight then, and all cause of diphtheria was removed.

Occasionally a lot of political bummers or loafers, called inspectors, are employed to go through the city and stir up a stink (this is when business gets dull with the Board). They go from house to house and hear the stories of tenants, and they will find a certain class that will have stink enough, and damp houses and cellars to complain of; especially those stinking and filthy tenants who never clean nor air out their houses and cellars, but expect the owner to do it. They delight to throw it all on the landlord, and make him clean up, through their faithful ally, the Board of Health; so when these emissaries return with their pockets full of complaints, (for they are much like the beggar-child or peddler-boy who is sent out to beg or steal, if they do not bring home about so much they get a whipping,) or, nearer home, if these agents do not bring in a large number of complaints, so the Board can send out a number of thousand of notices, they fear their occupation will be gone, unless they can make the people believe they are doing an immense business in abating nuisances and giving the tax-payers a return for the large amount of money expended.

This expensive Board of Health, with special laws enough to govern a nation, was got up at the time of the small-pox epidemic, in 1872. No law should ever be passed under excitement; no good results from such laws; but it is the time seized upon by persons who want to make places and positions with large salaries, and the hundreds of expectants rush to the legislature like an army, demanding that something be done to save the dear people, and the members of the legislature are eager to seize upon such opportunities to accede to these pressing demands and needless appeals to create a few \$3,000 positions for themselves (when they retire from the law-making power), or for some of their needy friends; and so the people are saddled with needless laws and useless commissions to be taxed for and perplexed with.

Now I wish it distinctly understood that I believe in a wise and discreet Board of Health, and the

whole expense for such in the city of Boston should not exceed \$20,000. Three sensible men of leisure who are not dependent upon office for their support, could be found, that would take the positions for \$1,000, each, a year, and with two inspectors and one clerk, could attend to all reasonable calls upon the Board. There is no occasion to look after all the complaints of worthless tenants and mischief-making people who complain of a privy smelling, for privies will smell at times, it is the nature of the institutions, and it cannot be proved that it is injurious to health or ever produced fever, diphtheria, or any of the kindred diseases; it may have produced nausea when a person's stomach was out of order, but it is a fact that can be proved, that persons who work at cleaning vaults and drains enjoy the best of health, and are seldom sick, and those that have worked at it all their days live to a good old age. There is nothing injurious from the smell of vaults and drains when escaping in the open air. The Board of Health of Boston think they are doing a smart thing when they can force a person to tear down a privy and put a water-closet in the house. As I have said, the smell does no harm in the open air, yet if there is any harm it will be when confined in the house, and this may be the cause of the increase in the death-rate in Boston. You cannot have a water-closet in the house without getting more or less smell, and the gas from the sewer (trap as much as you please), and this gas, together with gas collecting in houses not properly aired out, becomes poisonous, and the people who are the most clamorous for water-closets in the house, "and all the modern improvements," generally want to eat and do everything in the same room, too lazy to move about much, and are the kind that have the most sickness and think it is no fault of theirs, it is in the house, and they notify the Board of Health, and the owner of the house must be notified to remedy the evil and put to expense. This puts me in mind of a noted doctor who lived in Charlestown: he was called upon to visit a family who lived in two rooms, and were

always sick; he made some inquiries in regard to their case and concluded that all they needed was more out-door exercise and fresh air, and told the mother the children must go out more in the air; the mother said they had no yard, the privy filled the most of the yard, and she did not like to have them in the street. The doctor's reply was, "send them out, if you have no other place send them into the privy, it will be better than shut up here all the time." I have said it is better to have the privies out side; we may have a water famine, and if we should from any cause, then we shall have a stink pestilence if we have all the water-closets in the house.

I believe the Board of Health as it is conducted is a nuisance; anything that is over-done becomes a nuisance and destroys its usefulness. A machine that has extra gearing and friction not required for its simple working, requires more power, wears out sooner and becomes of bad repute. Eating and drinking are the main essentials of life, and yet they are the principal destroyers of life if indulged in to excess. A certain physician once said that more people dig premature graves with their teeth than in any other way. If the Board of Health wish to look for the cause of premature deaths and disease, they had better enter the dwellings and look after the manner in which people live, their habits and customs, whether they have proper air, exercise and food, seasonable hours for eating and sleeping; they will soon find the real cause of most of the sickness entailed upon the human family, and it will not be the smell of a privy nor a sink-spout. They will find amongst the class of people who want all "modern improvements" when they hire a house, and who have the most complaints to make about bad smells, &c., the most filthy and degraded state of living, enough to entail upon generations yet unborn, scrofula and its kindred attendants for the next century. But when you enter their houses to look after the cause, they are very ready to direct your attention from the

real cause of sickness to some more remote, and some one else has to suffer for their short-comings.

Every city and town should have a Board of Health, but they should be very discreet and cautious men, for the statutes confer upon them very large and arbitrary powers, such as are conferred upon no other officers; and if the power placed in their hands is used unwisely and indiscreetly, it brings upon the Board and the law an odium which destroys the efficiency of the Board and the law. No special legislation or law is needed by the city of Boston for its Board of Health; the general law upon the statutes which governs other Boards is sufficient to meet every needful case, and all special laws for Boston should be repealed and the Board should be limited to one-third of the money now expended; and I will guarantee that the people will be healthier and happier than they now are under the present management. In fact, the people are being strangled to death, taxed to death, and robbed by special laws. Every year Boston is asking the Legislature for special laws creating commissions, multiplying officers with high salaries to tax and annoy the people; they have got so numerous that the City Hall will not contain them, and they have swarmed over into Pemberton Square and other places, and this state of things will continue as long as incompetent men are sent to the legislature; for many of them are not ~~re~~-elected for their fitness and ability to make proper laws, but the miserable, worthless scamps who want these positions will rally their friends at the caucus, get the nomination, buy their election and pay the bills out of the public treasury after they have secured a fat position for themselves by special legislation. But I am happy to know that some of them by their extra exertions, find their way into the State Prison at Concord; it would be better for the community if more of them were there.

In one of the cities annexed to Boston in 1873 containing about 30,000 inhabitants, the Mayor and Aldermen were the Board of Health. The Board of Health were called upon to act on about twelve

causes of complaint within the city limits; in only four or five cases did they deem official action necessary; in these cases they took action and caused the nuisances to be abated with no expense to the city. In the same city the Board of Health of Boston issue some 3,000 notices at an expense of eight or ten thousand dollars a year. The people are annoyed and taxed without benefit. It is a true saying that, "they who are governed least are governed best;" and it is to be hoped that the people will take this matter in hand and send men to the legislature who will abolish half the special laws and commissions for the city of Boston, and turn out a large number of commissioners, inspectors and lazy mischief-making loafers who are drawing large salaries and producing nothing but mischief and discord in the community; set them at work at some useful employment or send them to the house of correction where many of them belong; we shall then have a healthier, happier and better community, taxes will be less, and all honest, industrious citizens will breathe freer, be less annoyed, their food will digest better, and the people will be healthier, happier, and their days will be lengthened as the annoyance above spoken of is shortened.

They are building a Big Sewer that will cost untold millions. It will be a fine large generator in which to manufacture the poisonous sewer gas (so much dreaded by the Board of Health) to be forced into the dwellings. The whole thing was got up to employ an army of engineers and salaried men to live upon the tax payers; to make jobs and contracts for city officials to make commissions out of, and a Board of Health to look after the stink created thereby. There was no need of this sewer; the sewers of Boston were sufficient for many years to come; the sewer gas collecting in them could have been disposed of by building chimneys at certain points to carry it off above the houses, or having furnaces at the bottom to burn up and destroy it, and the sediment collecting at the outlet of the sewers might be dredged out and carried off; all of which might have been

done for a small part of the interest that will accrue on the large outlay for this "Big Drain" on the Treasury.

Owners of property must meet and take action upon the matter; consult together upon this and the public good, or they will soon find their property mortgaged for more than it is worth to pay the debt of the City of Boston.

In connection with this I will touch upon another nuisance, which is the *building laws* of Boston; and in speaking of this I do not wish to cast any reflections upon the gentleman at the head of this department, for I believe if he should speak his sentiments he would say the laws were a humbug. These laws were enacted upon the excitement of the great fire in 1872; but instead of remedying the evils that caused the great and destructive fire, they utterly failed to accomplish the object intended. What did they do? They made laws which, from their cumbersome machinery and needless expense, almost preclude a man of moderate means from building a small house to shelter his family; yet there is nothing to prevent but all to encourage the building of those grand and lofty stores and structures in the air, far above where the force of the water can reach, and the putting a large quantity of hard pine lumber in the upper stories of said buildings, and when they get on fire, which they are very liable to from spontaneous combustion caused from over-insurance, or from any other cause, the whole city is in danger of being destroyed.

In touching upon this, I only wish to call the attention of citizens to the matter. I think there is four times as much law and money expended in this department as ought to be. Perhaps at another time I may go into this matter more in detail, and show up some other departments about the City Hall, but a word to the wise is sufficient, and I will leave the matter for your consideration. As this is a matter addressed to the common sense of all who may be interested, it will be appropriate to subscribe as

COMMON SENSE.